Vincent Mariani
September 2023

Typing in the IPA

In Linguistics, we often use the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to represent sounds in a consistent manner across languages. The main point of the IPA is that every sound has a symbol, and every symbol is a sound. Naturally then, there are some characters that aren't in the standard Latin alphabet that your keyboard is most likely set up for. To type these symbols, there are a few different ways that are detailed below.

Method 1: Keyman

Keyman is a free application for Windows, Mac, or Linux for Linguists typing in a variety of languages, including the IPA. It's installed as a native input method, so it's easy to switch between IPA and US layouts with a keyboard shortcut (Typically this is Win + Space on Windows or Control + Space on Mac).

Installation

1. You can install Keyman here, by selecting your platform from the "Products" drop down menu. The FAQ for each platform has a link to an installation tutorial.
2. After you install Keyman, install the SIL IPA layout here.
3. Once you install and configure Keyman as an input language on your computer, switch to it and try to type a schwa (ə) by typing "e=". If you get a schwa, you've done it correctly!

Use

Each IPA symbol on the Keyman keyboard consists of two or more keystrokes. In general, the key combination is based on the general shape of the symbol (so, "n"-like symbols such as ŋ, ɲ, and ɳ all begin with the letter "n"), and most are followed by either <, >, or =.

The best way to get used to the key combos is by using the SIL IPA layout page here, which is set up similarly to the IPA chart. It'll feel strange at first, but after a bit it'll be second nature.

One thing to note: To add diacritic marks, just keep typing after you have the symbol. For example, the Anii word "caa" is transcribed (with tones) as [tʃáà], which is typed as "ts=a@3a@1".

Method 2: Online Character Pickers

Another method is to use an online tool that allows you to point and click to type IPA characters. This is a lot simpler, but can be a bit more tedious since you need to copy and paste the result into whatever you're typing. Here's a link to a popular one called TypeIt.

Method 3: Unicode

The way that most modern computers deal with text is in Unicode. Every character in every script (including emoji) that a computer can render has a Unicode entry. This method is inconvenient compared to the other two, but if all else fails it will work. Just web search the symbol followed by "IPA unicode", and copy and paste it into your document. For example, searching for "voiced velar nasal IPA unicode" will bring up the Unicode character U+014B, which is ŋ.

A Note About Fonts

Not every font has the symbols required to display the full IPA. Usually Times New Roman can work, but if you run into any issues you can install one of two free SIL fonts, Charis and Doulos. Doulos is similar to Times New Roman, while Charis has a bit of a heavier stroke width for readability. (This document is written in Charis SIL Compact)

Links

- **Keyman:** https://keyman.com
- **SIL IPA Layout:** https://keyman.com/keyboards/sil_ipa
- **SIL IPA Reference Chart:** https://help.keyman.com/keyboard/sil_ipa/1.8.6/sil_ipa
- **TypeIt:** https://ipa.typeit.org/full/
- **Charis:** https://software.sil.org/charis/
- **Doulos:** https://software.sil.org/doulos/